

Quick Facts

In the month of June, 1,872 web surfers visited Rep. Nunes' website at www.nunes.house.gov.

Health care summit a success



For years now the Central Valley has suffered from an acute case of poverty. It has infected families and communities throughout the region, eating away at our institutions like a cancer.

Increasingly, that cancer has spread through our health care delivery system. Those who live in poverty often rely on government-funded insurance. However, that insurance typically does not cover the full cost of providing service and creates a constant drain on medical resources affecting us all.

Some residents lack any type of insurance and frequently turn to hospital emergency rooms for non-urgent medical needs. Because federal regulations require that health care providers treat anyone regardless of their ability to pay, this also burdens a system already stretched thin.

The cumulative result is we have fewer and fewer resources to meet the needs of a large population on government insurance. New physicians just out of medical school with tens of thousands of dollars of loan debt can't afford to set up shop here. And physicians we've relied on for years are struggling to keep the lights on because of an underwhelming income base and high overhead costs.

The problem of poverty has a domino effect, and we're beginning to see them fall at an alarming rate.

But there may be some relief in sight. I asked a group of health care leaders to organize a summit focused on finding practical solutions I could craft into legislation and introduce in Congress. I cannot thank these health care leaders, who later formed the advisory committee of the summit, enough for the guidance and insight they provided in this process. Their efforts culminated in a well-attended conference in Visalia that produced promising

results.

Already, proposals made at the summit are being crafted into legislative language. I'm getting encouraging feedback from the Committee on Ways and Means on folding these proposals into the forthcoming Medicare reform bill.

Some of the proposed solutions include recruiting new physicians and keeping the loyal doctors we have by offering loan forgiveness programs and tax credits for those who treat patients with little or no insurance.

Another recommendation developed at the summit would deal with crowded emergency rooms. By creating flexibility in the regulations that require treatment of all who enter the emergency room, we believe patient screening and extending the business hours of clinic facilities in or near emergency rooms could alleviate some of the burden. But crowding in the emergency rooms also needs to be addressed by helping hospitals increase their bed capacity.

Other recommendations call on employers and federal officials for help. One such recommendation featured a federal income tax credit for employers of agricultural workers who provide basic family health care insurance. Another proposal was to increase the rate by which physicians and health care facilities are reimbursed for providing medical care to patients with government-funded insurance.

Even if we could get two to three of these proposals passed into law, it would be a significant improvement for the health care system in the Central Valley. And as a benefit, we could all take a measure of satisfaction in knowing that the lessons learned from our burden helped improve health care for our neighbors around the nation.

Editorial by Devin Nunes